A pigment-processing slab from La Crozo de Gentillo (or La Grotte de Combe-Cullier, Commune de Lacave (Lot).

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FRENCH PALEOLITHIC COLLECTIONS IN THE LOGAN MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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A Pigment Processing Slab from La Crozo de Gentillo (or La Grotte de Combe-Cullier), Commune de Lacave (Lot)[1]

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INTRODUCTION

A plaquette carrying accession number 12 527 and described as a "*molette de grès rouge*" is one of three such objects housed in the Logan Museum of Anthropology at Beloit College. We have been unable to locate the other two, but we know that one of the three was displayed in the Museum in 1954. The object studied here comes from the site of Crozo de Gentillo (or the Grotte de Combe-Cullier), commune de Lacave (Lot) and was sold to the Museum in June, 1926 by Armand Viré. The Logan Museum accession card indicates, in error as we shall see, that the object is Aurignacian.

This small cave in the Dordogne Valley, excavated beginning in 1906 by Viré, has yielded large numbers of stone and bone artifacts as well as abundant faunal remains. Hearths, traces of ochre and portable art objects suggest an extensive occupation of this site. In spite of intensive excavations in the past, the dating of the Crozo de Gentillo is still the subject of debate and the chronological attribution of its assemblage(s) is at present only provisional.

CHRONOLOGICAL ATTRIBUTION OF THE SITE

According to Viré, the lithic material was extremely homogeneous throughout the entire thickness of the archaeological deposit (which extends from 25 to 155 cm below ground level), and microliths were abundant everywhere. Viré waffled concerning the chronological attribution of the site, first suggesting that it was Aurignacian (Viré 1908) – which explains mention of the Aurignacian on the Beloit College accession card – and then that it was early Magdalenian (Viré and Niederlander 1921), and finally, in his later publications (1926), that it was late Magdalenian. More recently, the analysis of objects recovered from Viré's backdirt combined with a review of those pieces published by Viré, have provided a better understanding of the typological characteristics of the Crozo de Gentillo assemblage.

According to Lorblanchet (1969: 258), we could be dealing with a middle Magdalenian, immediately subsequent to the Magdalenian with raclettes. However, it is very possible that there was a mixture of several middle Magdalenian levels. The ab-

sence of harpoons and the importance of tools on bladelets and microliths (denticulates and triangles, among other forms) and the presence of "*sagaies à rainures*" seem to imply a Magdalenian II/III, while the presence of a "*sagaie à base fourchue*" can be interpreted as evidence for a Magdalenian IV level (Lorblanchet 1969: 258) (but see Matthew's paper, this volume). In addition, the use of twisted perspective to engrave a small deer on bone hints at a fairly early stage of the Magdalenian (Lorblanchet 1969: 259). The presence of arched-back points raises the possibility of an eventual re-use of the cave by the Azilians. However, Lorblanchet (1969: 259) emphasizes that such points existed from the beginning of the lower Périgordian onward and, therefore, their presence does not constitute proof of an Azilian occupation.

Hence, the tool assemblage from this site can be attributed entirely to Magdalenian II to IV, and Lorblanchet notes that this is precisely the chronological position to which it was attributed successively by the Abbé Breuil, Denis Peyrony and A. Cheynier (Lorblanchet 1969: 259).

Nevertheless, improvements in excavation techniques allowing for recovery of microliths, which were often passed over in older excavations, have led, in many cases, to a re-examination of assemblages traditionally attributed to Magdalenian II/III. This is especially true of recent findings at Reignac and Gare de Couze. Moreover, new excavations undertaken by M. Fliès at Crozo de Gentillo have yielded two groups of levels, both of them attributable to a late Magdalenian without harpoons. The uppermost group is, more specifically, characterized by Couze-type geometric microliths (Fliès cited by Lorblanchet 1969: 259).

In 1973, Lorblanchet (Lorblanchet et al 1973: 259) summarized the question in the following terms:

> *Au début du siècle, la grotte de Combe-Cullier (Lacave) a donné à A. Viré au cours de fouilles mal conduites un riche outillage que tous les spécialistes (H. Breuil, D. Peyrony, J. Bouyssonie, A. Cheynier) ont attribué au Magdalénien II-III et dans lequel quelques éléments semblaient pouvoir à mon avis appartenir aussi au Magdalénien IV. Or d'après M. Fliès qui a repris les recherches depuis quelques années, l'industrie de Combe-Cullier appartiendrait exclusivement à un Magdalénien final sans harpon du type Couze.*

In 1987, Lorblanchet referred to level 9 at Combe-Cullier in suggesting that it was contemporaneous with level III at the grotte Sainte-Eulalie and with the lower level in the grotte de la Bergerie de Caniac-du-Causse. This latter level, according to Lorblanchet and Welté (1990) is characterized by,

> *un petit outillage de Magdalénien moyen riche en microlithes, avec autant de grattoirs que de burins, que la présence d'une pointe à cran du type de Hambourg avait fait d'abord attribuer à un Magdalénien supérieur sans harpons mais que le radiocarbone situe aux environs de 15830 BP + 400* (LY. 1830).

They specify that, in the Quercy, this kind of assemblage succeeds the Magdalenian with raclettes. In sum, Lorblanchet maintains his hypothesis of a middle Magdalenian contrary to the still unpublished opinion of Fliès.

Thus, the question remains unresolved; and we still do not know if we are dealing with a middle Magdalenian or a special facies of the final Magdalenian. Just recently, Lorblanchet informed us that he still attributes the Combe-Cullier industry, as he did in 1969, to a Magdalenian with triangles, subsequent to the Magdalenian with raclettes but prior to the Magdalenian with harpoons. He added that Carbon 14 dating seemed to confirm this attribution as level 9 has now been dated to 15030 BP + 330,

a date that corroborates the presence of Saiga antelope in the faunal assemblage. According to him (in litteris, March 7, 1989),

> *Il s'agirait donc là d'un de ces prétendus "Magdaléniens supérieurs sans harpons" qui se révèlent être du Magdalénien moyen.*

However, this attribution is obviously provisional in awaiting the publication of Fliès's excavations. The reader is referred to Matthew's article, this volume, for a further discussion of the chronology of this site.

THE SANDSTONE PLAQUETTE

In the first publication on the site, Viré (1908: 416) mentions 10 fragments[2] of fine- and hard-grained sandstone probably from the Brive area. The largest piece measured 10 × 7 × 2 cm. They all had surfaces polished by use and, in some cases, sloped toward the center. We assume that the plaquette presented here (and the two others originally acquired by Beloit College) was part of this group of objects. We have no knowledge as to the whereabouts of the remainder of the plaquettes or the limestone grinding stones also mentioned by Viré.

This iron-rich sandstone plaquette, broken in two fragments, was glued back together. It exhibits two other ancient fracture surfaces, which seem to predate the traces of use. The plaquette measures 96.4 × 70.3 mm in its current state, and its maximum thickness is 28.8 mm.

The entire plaquette is coated with red ochre (Figure 1a). The upper surface, perfectly flat, shows numerous traces of scraping easily visible to the naked eye and under the binocular microscope. These stigmata are oriented parallel and oblique to the long axis, which implies that the object was used in a more-or-less constant position. In addition, the plaquette shows some impact scars, most abundant near the middle of the upper surface. These scars were created by a direct, localized blow (Figure 2). The opposing face seems not to have been employed in the same way, but it is missing a fragment and, unfortunately, the part that remains intact has been coated with a deposit of glue, thereby obscuring any traces of use (Figure 1b).

Was this implement used in an active or a passive fashion? Its size does not help us much, being perfectly compatible with use as a working platform or with use as a hand-held, mechanically active implement. Its shape, and more specifically the flatness of its upper face, suggests active use. Normally, in the case of passive use, we expect to see a concave surface. The traces of pigment which penetrate every surface of the piece argue in favor of active use, since an immobile platform has a better chance of remaining pristine on its bottom surface than an object that can be rotated in the hand, in this case perhaps a hand coated with pigment. The scrapes also suggest an active use, since their orientation corresponds very well to what we would expect of a hand-held implement, in which the longitudinal axis is always slightly oblique to arm movement.

Nevertheless, the impact scars distributed across the surface, but somewhat more abundant near the center of the upper face could just as easily result from passive as active use. If they are related to the use of pigment, as one might imagine, they were perhaps created during the breaking down of pigment fragments, the plaquette serving as a passive platform for the application of a hard, pointed rock such as a hammerstone or a stone pick to reduce the pigment fragments.

One can also imagine the active application of the plaquette (*percussion posée*) as a mulling implement for treating a particular surface (wood, bone, hide, etc.) with pigment and being used secondarily as a kind of hammer (*percussion lancée*). This is in line with certain composite implements which combine the two types of percussion (de Beaune 1989).

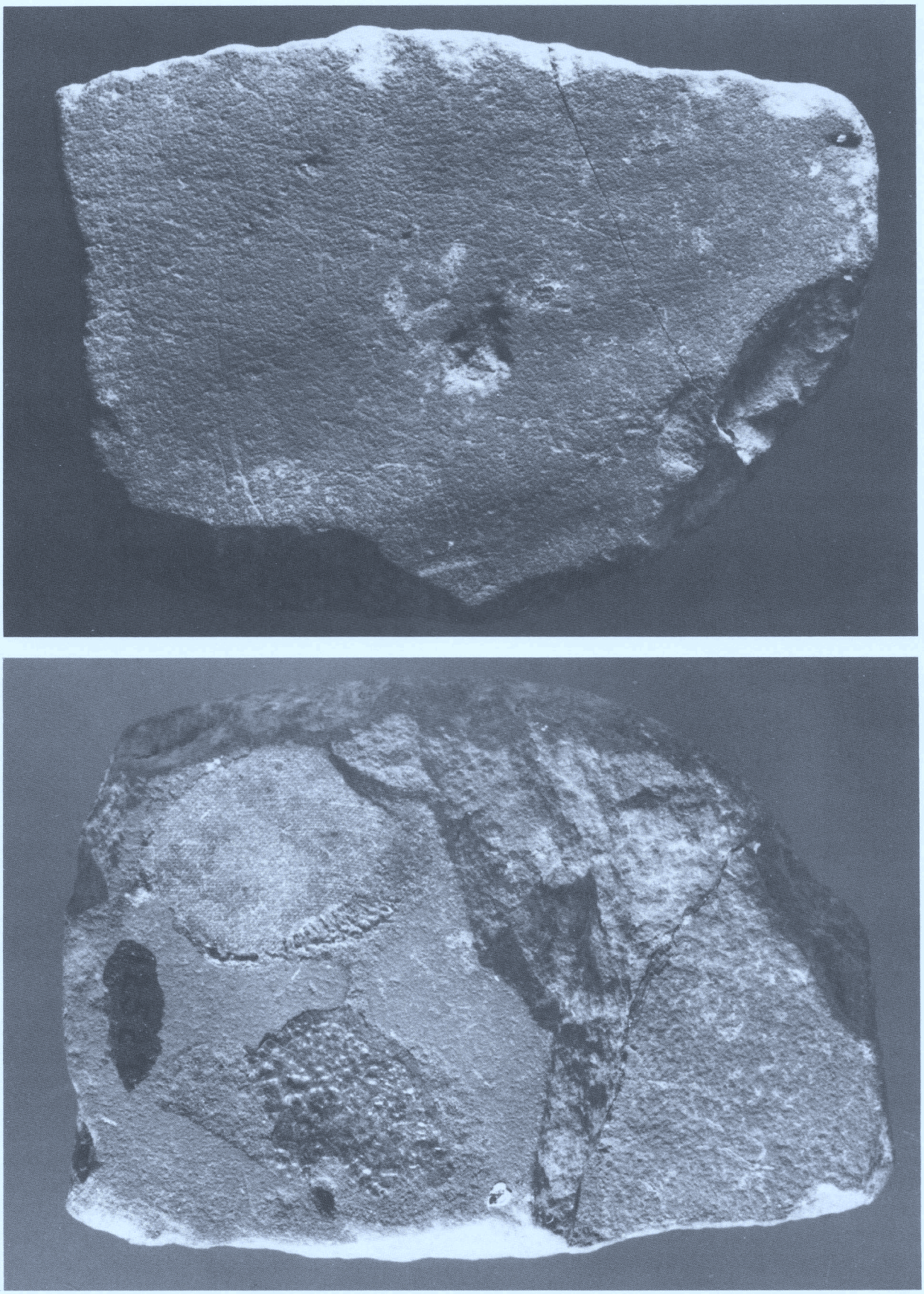

Figure 1. Sandstone *Plaquette*. Top and bottom surfaces. Traces of scraping and impact are visible on the upper surface, as is the ochre which impregnates the entire surface. Photo by R. White.

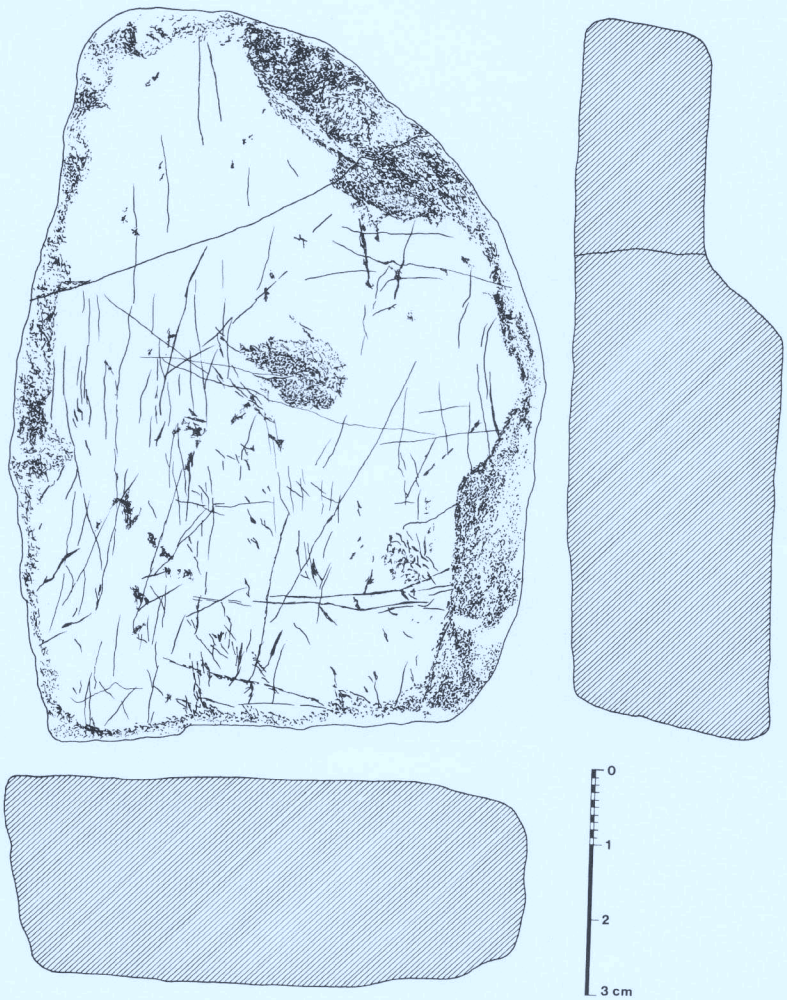

Figure 2. Sandstone *Plaquette*. Rendering of traces of impact and scraping visible on the upper surface. Longitudinal and transverse profiles of the *plaquette* are also illustrated. Drawing by S.A. de Beaune.

The relative weight of arguments in favor of one or the other use of this plaquette permit us to conclude that this was an implement mainly used for spreading pigment, perhaps on solid but supple surfaces such as animal hides. In addition, the plaquette was occasionally used in forceful percussion, either as an active or passive element.

Mullers are well known in the Paleolithic, but never very abundant in a given site. There are several types: Circular or oval ones similar to those found among more recent agriculturalists; Globular pebbles often with intersecting wear-facets; Irregularly-shaped plaquettes, like the one described here, showing use on one or more of their surfaces; Cobbles with one or more of their extremities heavily worn, related to grinding stones when use striae are perpendicular to the long axis of the cobble. Elsewhere (de Beaune 1989) we have presented a preliminary classification of these implements.

Plaquettes of the type presented here, while not abundant, are found in a variety of sites. Their lack of abundance is perhaps best explained by their irregular and largely unaltered form, which led to their neglect and abandonment during older excavations. As a result, they have seldom been published or even mentioned in the literature.

Small plaquettes covered with ochre are frequently noted, and we have seen many unpublished examples in public and private collections during previous research on Paleolithic lamps and bowl-like stone objects. Objects comparable to that described here include a sandstone plaquette from Laugerie-Basse (No.7)[3] entirely covered with ochre (de Beaune 1987: 182, Fig. 78, No. 10) and another of the same material and comparable dimensions from Pairnon-Pair (No. 2) which apparently also served as a lamp (de Beaune 1987: 213, Fig. 86, No.2).

A recently published artifact merits particular attention because of its close similarity to the Crozo de Gentillo specimen in form, dimensions (7 x 10 x 0.8 cm), raw material and traces of use. It comes from the Magdalenian VI at the grotte de Sainte-Eulalie at Espagnac (Lot). Traces of pecking and certain marks interpreted as a possible geometric figure suggest to us a similar kind of implement. It is partially coated with red ochre. According to Lorblanchet (Lorblanchet et al 1973: 249-250, Fig. 72) it could be a palette that also served as a hammerstone or retoucher (Lorblanchet and Welté 1990). These two different kinds of markings confirm the similarity of the Saint-Eulalie piece with that from Crozo de Gentillo presented here.

FOOTNOTES

1. I wish to thank Randall White, who gave permission to study and publish this object (and who was kind enough to translate this article).

2. Since the present analysis was done, L. Matthews has located several more of these sandstone fragments, which had been misplaced at the Logan Museum. They will be studied and described in the near future.

3. The numbers cited here correspond to the numbering of lamps used in our synthesis of such objects (de Beaune 1987).

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